

External Referencing of Standards (ERoS)



An example of a collaborative end-to-end peer review process for external referencing

Final Project Report



Curtin University



Queensland University
of Technology



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OF WOLLONGONG
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UNIVERSITY



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Cover image: Illustration of the eight referencing instances carried out during the project. Triple dashed lines represent triads, double dashed lines represent dyads and the single dashed line represents the one-way review carried out between RMIT and Wollongong.

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Executive Summary

The External Referencing of Standards (ERoS) project is a collaboration between RMIT University, The University of Wollongong, Queensland University of Technology and Curtin University.

The purpose of the EROS Project was to develop and test a collaborative end-to-end process to verify student attainment standards. The requirement for external referencing and benchmarking is specified in the revised Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) to come into effect on January 1, 2017.

The following external referencing and benchmarking projects have been used to assist in the development the EROS methodology and processes; *“Assuring learning and teaching standards through inter-institutional peer review and moderation”*; Achievement Matters: External Peer Review of Accounting Learning Standards project; the methodology of the Group of Eight (G08) Quality Verification System (QVS) system; the Academic Calibration Project of the Innovative Research Institutions which is closely aligned to the QVS system.

The EROS project team chose not to use the double ‘blind’ peer review methodology favoured in similar projects (see section 2) but instead to opt for a transparent and open process of collaboration. It was felt there was much to be gained through a moderated process of engagement that enabled academics to have a shared conversation about standards issues related to de-identified pieces of assessment in the context of learning outcomes at course and unit level.

The methodology tracked the hours of academic staff using standardised electronic portable document format (PDF) templates to gather data to inform the cost of academic time per course per university. This was used to provide data on the costs of the processes and, consequently, sustainability.

Feedback from academic staff was sought on the methodology, process, supporting information and report templates.

Important outcomes of the EROS project are:

1. A set of practice principles to underpin the work of external referencing
2. A collaborative peer review process that provides insights important to the improvement of the quality of courses and student attainment standards
3. A process academic staff found compelling, with enhanced practice based development opportunities and the prospect of ongoing cross-institution collaboration.

4. A process that was well understood by academic staff through the supporting information and templates
5. A scalable and sustainable process model for the tertiary sector
6. A report template that captures in one document the external reference comments and recommendations, and the response of the university to the review
7. Based on experience, improvements to the methodology, information and templates of the project
8. A narrative on the tension between sufficiency of process to meet a legislative standard, and a process that prioritises course improvement
9. Costing models based on the processes implemented
10. Documentation of the administrative support roles required to reduce the burden of process on academic staff

The ERoS project has not made specific recommendations for consideration by collaborating university. It was felt this would allow latitude for each institution to consider the findings of the report and move forward with an approach appropriate for the learning and teaching strategy of each institution.

1. Project Background and Purpose

The external referencing of standards describes a process by which one or more institutions agree to collaborate in referencing the assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes at course and unit level.

“Referencing” in the External Referencing of Standards project (ERoS) means the assessment and report provided by a peer with knowledge and expertise from a comparable course of study, based at another institution.

The requirement for external referencing of comparable courses is specified in the revised Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards), passed by Federal Parliament at the end of 2015, to come into effect on January 1, 2017. The relevant standard (5.3.1) Monitoring, Review and Improvement states (Appendix 2):

“All accredited courses of study are subject to periodic (at least every seven years) comprehensive reviews that are overseen by peak academic governance processes and include external referencing or other benchmarking activities.”

External Referencing is one of several quality improvement strategies articulated in the HESF that also includes¹:

¹ See HES 5.3 Monitoring, Review and Improvement – Standards 1 – 7

- Frequent ongoing review
- Comprehensive review

The revised HESF makes frequent ongoing review, external referencing and comprehensive review routine requirements in the cycle of course review and quality improvement. While there are few precedents for how this may go ahead, clear processes need to be systematic and documented with evidence of improvements made to programs.

Models of External Referencing

In developing a methodology and process, the ERoS project looked at three Australian models of external referencing of achievement standards established within the higher education sector. These are at various stages of development, testing and implementation. The three models are similar in that they all examine the validity and reliability of teaching and learning standards; yet differ slightly in their methodology with regard to the depth and breadth of the review (Deane & Krause, 2013).

Achievement Matters: External Peer Review of Accounting Learning Standards project (AMA) is a double blind process focuses on consensus on the achievement of course level learning outcomes of randomly sampled student work drawn across all grades^{2,3}.

The methodology of the Group of Eight (G08) Quality Verification System (QVS) system requires that reviewers judge the accuracy of the marked assessment items from a stratified random sample across five different grade bands^{2,4}. The Academic Calibration Project of the Innovative Research Institutions is closely aligned to the QVS system.

² Deane, E., & Krause, K. "Towards a learning standards framework. Learning and teaching standards (LaTS) project: peer review and moderation in the disciplines." (2013). Retrieved from http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/398620/Learning_Std_Framewk_Final_Dec_2012.pdf

³ Watty, Kim, et al. "Social moderation, assessment and assuring standards for accounting graduates." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 39.4 (2014): 461-478. doi:10.1080/02602938.2013.848336

⁴ Go8. "Go8 Quality Verification System: Assessment Review Guidelines." (2013). Retrieved from Canberra: <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/learning/reviews/benchmarking/external/QVS-2014-assessment-review-guidelines.pdf>

The Teaching and Learning Standards (TaLS) Project process requires assessment grading of clean copies of stratified randomly sampled assessment tasks across four grade bands^{2,5} ;.

In addition, in 2015 the OLT funded development and testing of benchmarking models for private colleges. Tabor College in Adelaide is the lead college in this project. Table 1 (next page) summarises the relevant projects and methodologies across the country⁶.

⁵ Krause, K.-L., Scott, G., Aubin, K., Alexander, H., Angelo, T., Campbell, S., . . . Pattison, P. "Assuring Learning and Teaching Standards through Inter-Institutional Peer Review and Moderation: Final Report of the Project." (2014) Retrieved from University of Western Sydney website: http://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/576916/External_Report_2014_Web_3.pdf.

⁶ Mark Freeman (updated 17 July 2014) adapted from ⁵

Table 1: External Peer Review Models for Coursework Degrees (Adapted from Freeman, 2014)

	Quality Verification System (Go8 and IRU)	Inter-Institutional Review Project	Achievement Matters Accounting Project	UK External Examiner System
Intent	1. Quality Assurance 2. Quality Enhancement	1. Quality Assurance 2. Quality Enhancement	1. Quality Assurance 2. Quality Enhancement	1. Quality Assurance 2. Quality Enhancement
Authority	Institutional	Institutional	Disciplinary	Institutional
Discipline Focus	Multiple disciplines across universities in one mission group	Multiple disciplines across multiple university mission groups	Single discipline across multiple higher education institution mission groups	All higher education institutions
Method: Key Points of Similarity and Difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • de-identified unit materials provided to peer reviewer • stratified sample of graded assessments • (maximum 5 items per 5 grade bands for G08; 12 items for IRU) • grades and comments provided • peer reviewer verifies (or disagrees with) grade allocated by home university • peer reviewer recruited with demonstrated understanding of academic standards in similar universities • ongoing system for bachelor degrees, in fourth year of operation in 2014 for G08 • IRU in second year of a trial for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blind peer review, de-identified unit materials using feedback form • stratified assessment samples (1 item per 4 grade bands) • all grades and comments removed • peer reviewer grades 4 items of work using home university criteria • judgements in the context of external reference points (e.g. discipline standards, Australian Qualifications Framework) but these are not made explicit • two-year project for bachelor degrees completed in 2013 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • double-blind peer review, de-identified assessment samples and input materials • assessment items sampled randomly from all grades for tasks evidencing published discipline standards • all grades, markings, identifiers removed • two peer reviewers rate task and if valid rate 5 items of work • reviewers explicitly guided to use nationally agreed published discipline threshold standards in judgements • in groups prior to review, calibration occurs to achieve consensus on assessment design validity and items (not) meeting published standards • practitioner participation in calibration • professional bodies participation in governance • four-year project for bachelor and coursework masters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • external examiner reviews assessments on multiple later units in discipline • external examiner sometimes verifies proposed exams and may propose changes • while all graded assessments and dissertations available after exams, examiner samples all grade bands • examiner verifies marks, grades and award class allocated by home university and can propose class-wide changes before institution confirms • based on prior UK institutional experience • institution coordinates examiners • examiners may be practitioners • national system, embedded in culture and process • explicitly articulated by regulator (QAA) in code

	Quality Verification System (Go8 and IRU)	Inter-Institutional Review Project	Achievement Matters Accounting Project completing in 2014	UK External Examiner System
Unit and mode of comparison or benchmark	G08: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> two final year units of study level, ideally one capstone IRU: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> capstone units in final year of study Both: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> grade verified not re-marked implicit degree standards (HD, D, C, P, F) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> one unit of study level assessment items re-marked (re-graded) implicit national bachelors' standards (D, C, P and F) but using home criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> selected tasks aligned to published discipline standards (from multiple final units of study) explicitly rated for validity against published national standards assessment items re-marked against explicit national standards (i.e. continuum not meeting to meeting threshold standard) home criteria prompt but not summative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> multiple coursework units of study and dissertations in discipline assessment items reviewed in context of overall grading for award class implicit national standard (1, 2i, 2ii, 3, F) benchmarked to prior experience informed by various standards and requirements
Sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> stratified random sampling of assessments from final year students in selected unit of study, preferably a capstone G08: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5% (max 5) per grade band maximum 25 items from large classes IRU: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 samples of student work across grade bands for each unit of study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> stratified random sampling of assessments from final year students in selected unit of study 1 item per grade band for one assessment task (total of 4 items) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> institution nominates final-year task that best demonstrates published discipline standards, project manager nominates random sample for review tasks typically cover multiple discipline standards 5 random assessment items sampled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> all graded coursework assessments from multiple units of study and dissertations available but typically stratified sampling no minimum or maximum sampled but external examiner typically considers all Firsts and Fails
Peer Reviewers	Go8: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one academic reviewer per discipline specified as Level D or above (not always) secretariat selects and assigns randomly from a panel paid an honorarium IRU: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one academic reviewer per unit of study specified as level C or above home university involved in selection of reviewer from IRU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two partner institutions review same material reviewers to be experienced in the discipline, not sessional staff, preferably unit coordinator blind assignment of reviewers by project officer paid an honorarium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two reviewers with substantial experience and third if first two disagree one home academic also reviews (often different to original coordinator or grader) all reviewers calibrated to national standard, with practitioner participation in calibration workshops blind assignment of reviewers, once calibrated, by project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> one external examiner per discipline (e.g. BA Accounting) although sometimes narrower (e.g. Financial Accounting & Taxation Law sub-disciplines) or broader (e.g. award) recruited within or beyond academia by institution via established networks tenure typically 4 years (plus 1-year extension option) examiners limited to

	Quality Verification System (Go8 and IRU)	Inter-Institutional Review Project	Achievement Matters Accounting Project	UK External Examiner System
	database • paid an honorarium		manager • unpaid	two institutions
Basis of Comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaching and learning standards reviewed through guided feedback form – feedback on unit content, assessment design, criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaching standards reviewed through user guide and feedback form – feedback on unit content, assessment design, criteria learning standards reviewed grades allocated by two, unknown, calibrated frameworks, benchmark statements and comparison, with rationale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaching and learning standards reviewed through online feedback form with justification and recommendations benchmarked to published standards rating allocated by two, unknown, calibrated frameworks, benchmark statements and comparison, with rationale external reviewers and one calibrated reviewer from home institution third external reviewer moderates consensus if first two disagree on rating assessment task validity or an item of student work meeting standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> examiner judgement on achievement and comparable standards based on prior UK institutional experience implicitly informed by thresholds in published national qualifications frameworks, benchmark statements and requirements of any professional, statutory or regulatory body general comments on unit content, assessment design, criteria

	Quality Verification System (Go8 and IRU)	Inter-Institutional Review Project	Achievement Matters Accounting Project	UK External Examiner System
Result of Comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaching and learning standards reviewed against targeted questions grades verified or not – distribution of agree/too high/too low per grade level no impact on student grades reviewer makes overall judgement as appropriate/ some risks/ immediate action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> home university receives graded assessment items and feedback on teaching standards from two partner universities/peers on 4 items of work no impact on student grades identity remains unknown unless partners agree to discuss outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> home university receives feedback in report (and online) on tasks from three peers, and if tasks valid, grades and feedback on 5 items of work feedback in context of meeting or exceeding published discipline standards no impact on student grades identities remain unknown peer reviewers conduct home calibration events using national project exemplars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> external examiner recommends action for band or cohort if disagreement exceeds approximately 10% sampled external examiner attends exam board where any recommendation for overall grade changes considered external examiner completes a formal report that includes a question about national comparison of results and a question if adequate responses to previous external examiner comments

The purpose of the ERoS project was to develop and test a process that can be implemented and integrated into routine operations with collaborating institutions.

RMIT University, Curtin University, Queensland University of Technology, and the University of Wollongong partnered to develop and test a methodology and process. Improvements to the process and templates developed and tested are outlined in Section 7 of this report.

ERoS Principles

The ERoS team proposed a set of guiding principles to focus the study which were later refined at the conclusion of the project into a set of practice principles, which are:

1. **Effective** - Supports both the quality enhancement and quality assurance of courses and units
2. **Efficient** - Efficiently enables the external referencing of assessment methods and grading of students' attainment of learning outcomes across comparable courses of study

3. **Transparent and open** - The process engages multiple perspectives and facilitates critical and open dialogue between teaching staff across comparable courses to support consensus building around standards of student learning outcomes
4. **Capability Building** - Contributes to the professional development of participating staff and discipline communities of practice
5. **Sustainable** - Provides sustainable end-to-end process for external referencing that can be operationalised and used routinely by participating institutions.

2. Project Team

Each university participating in the ERoS project nominated project team members. These are:



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3. Project Approach and Methodology

In the OLT project *“Assuring learning and teaching standards through inter-institutional peer review and moderation”*⁷, the authors state *“academic staff in the disciplines were supported by linking them up with ‘fellow travellers’ who were teaching and assessing the same subjects in different institutions”*.⁸

ERoS also matched “fellow travellers” from disciplines teaching similar units of study. The matchmaking of academic staff was supported and moderated by staff from the respective central university teaching and learning units.

Importantly, as stated in the practice principles, the ERoS project team chose not to use the double ‘blind’ peer review methodology favoured in the OLT project but to opt for a transparent and open process. It was felt there was much to be gained through a moderated process of engagement that enabled academics to openly discuss and explore standards issues related to specific de-identified pieces of assessment in the context of learning outcomes at course and unit level. This enabled similar enhanced practice based development opportunities for academic staff, and the prospect of ongoing cross-institution collaboration.

Feedback from academic staff confirmed that these interactions throughout the ERoS project were compelling and important. It is also of note that the process established by the OLT project now continues at the home institution but is no longer a blind peer review as often only one other institution is involved.⁹

A further consideration with the double blind methodology is, therefore, one of viability when a very limited number of institutions are involved, which will often be the case. Referencing may often only involve two or three institutions, and achieving this is sufficiently resource intensive.

“Referencing” then in the ERoS project means the assessment and report provided on a course and unit of study by a peer from another university teaching in the same discipline and similar unit of study. The ERoS approach focussed on assessment

⁷ Krause, K., Scott, G., Aubin, K., Alexander, ERoS., Angelo, T., Campbell, S., Carroll, M., Deane, E., Nulty, D., Pattison, P., Probert, B., Sachs, J., Solomonides, I., Vaughan, S. (2014).

⁸ Ibid p.22

⁹ National Peer Review of Assessment Workshops - Sydney 16 June, 2016. Venue: Aerial Function Centre, Building 10, University of Technology Sydney - Mr Royson Valore, Manager, Quality Systems, Planning and Reviews, Western Sydney University.

standards in units drawn from the final year of courses. Units chosen were those that best demonstrated coverage of course learning outcomes.

Another important element of the ERoS process is the provision for the university whose course is being reviewed to document their response to comments and recommendations of the final report. This provides in one report the recommendations made and a record of the improvements adopted.

In view of the enthusiasm of academic staff for ERoS process of engagement, there is a concurrent need for institutions to acknowledge and celebrate achievements identified in reviews.

Learning outcomes, assessment and student attainment

The ERoS methodology included learning outcomes at course and unit level, and their alignment to assessment methods and student work samples. It asked for a review of the suitability of the learning outcomes for the course and unit of study against the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), and whether the method of assessment was appropriate to demonstrate attainment of the learning outcomes. Critical to this was the description and communication of the performance standards required for **achieving** learning outcomes. A rubric was used in most cases, and in others marking schemes or exemplars to foster a shared understanding of the standard required across the teaching, marking teams and student cohort.

This approach differed from that used by the Group of Eight and Innovative Research Institutions, which focussed on samples of assessment. It was the view of the ERoS project team that course and unit learning outcomes are the important design context for assessment and inform the review of samples of student work that demonstrate attainment standards.

Dyads and triads pilots

The methodology of the project proposed, ideally, that all external references occur as triads. That is, three institutions form a cross-institutional group review the chosen discipline units and samples of assessment. Each university would then have the benefit of external referencing of two other institutions, thus building more calibrated' academic¹⁰ outcomes through greater depth and breadth of perspective.

In practice, triads were difficult to arrange, not always possible given the limited number of institutions involved and consequently several dyads went ahead instead. In one case a one-way review (an Engineering unit at Wollongong reviewed by

¹⁰ D. Royce Sadler Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice - 2012, 1–15

RMIT) was included. The following external references were conducted during the project:

Table 2: ERoS referencing structures by discipline and institutions involved.

Structure	Discipline	Institutions
Dyad	Business (Capstone)	Wollongong, Curtin
	Diploma of Languages (French)	Wollongong, RMIT
	Fashion and Textiles	QUT, RMIT
	Psychology	Curtin, Wollongong
	Marketing (Strategic)	RMIT, Curtin
Triad	Education (Professional Studies)	QUT, Wollongong, Curtin
	Nursing (Professional Studies)	QUT, Wollongong, Curtin
One-way review	Engineering	RMIT reviewed Wollongong

Implementation of the ERoS Process

Figure 1, on the next page, provides a breakdown of the implementation steps in the ERoS process to for an external reference.

Figure 1 (overleaf): ERoS Project External Reference Process Steps¹¹

¹¹ Sefcik LT, Bedford S, Czech P, Smith J and, Yorke J (2017) Good practice principles of external referencing of standards in higher education – Relationship building with ERoS. *Submission in 2016*.



Managing the process

In view of the workload issues at all institutions, and to realise the ERoS principles, each pilot was managed so that academic effort effectively focused on the review of standards, not administration of the process. For efficiency and sustainability of the process, central administrative units undertook the:

1. initial matchmaking
2. signing of participation agreements
3. collection and exchange of the review materials
4. redaction of student work samples
5. setting up of online meetings, timetable and record keeping
6. closing the loop on reporting processes and action planning
7. feedback, evaluation e.g. timesheets and focus groups

In addition, each pilot was managed by one of the 4 institutions, simplifying the process through a single point of contact with clear lines of communication for academics.

It was notable that several factors sometimes impeded the progress of reviews:

- **Adequacy of unit information** – The unit structure and its context needed to be more specific about the scheduled learning timeline e.g. where the various assessments fit into the overall unit structure and the proportion of overall assessment.
- **Missing randomly selected samples of student assessment** - An explanation required of why a certain grade of student work samples e.g. a pass substituted for a just fail was provided.
- **What reviewers should comment on** – For the free text comments sections of the methodology guidance required on the kinds of comments that could be made, especially on the last section 4 “other matters you wish to raise”. De-identified samples of completed reports could be helpful here.

4. Project Outcomes and Evaluation

The ERoS project ran for some 12 months' duration and in that time successfully delivered its key aim to provide an effective, relatively efficient on this scale, comprehensive process for external referencing that can be operationalised and used routinely by participating institutions. The evaluation has identified the strengths within in the process, templates and resources. There are some potential weaknesses (some noted in 4.4 Managing the process. Other addressed in 7 of the report) that have been recognised and recommendations for improvements made.

Outcomes:

1. The ERoS process provides insights³ valuable to enact quality enhancement of assessment methods in units and courses but the effectiveness of this diminishes if the recommendations are not well captured within an improvement cycle e.g. end-to-end review (Figure 1). In addition, the effectiveness of assuring course level attainment standards through peer review of an assessment item within one core unit may be improved by including more or all of the assessment in the unit. Some feedback from the project evaluation supported the need to consider all assessment in a unit to effectively reference attainment standards.

"I would love to work through the feedback and identify improvements. I do not want it to end here."

— ERoS participant feedback

2. The ERoS process steps were well understood by participating academic staff aided by the supporting tools and resources. It demonstrated that general consensus can be reached on assessments and outcome standards in comparable courses being taught in different institutions. On this scale, once the participants actually started the process all felt that it was effective and efficient in terms of the review process and not onerous on time. However, most reviewers did require guidance from the ERoS team and would value exemplars on how to complete the process template (report).

3. Improvements in both internal and external communication were an important set of outcomes of the project:

- a) The ERoS methodology compels a “unit leader” and “course leader” to come to a shared understanding around learning outcomes, appropriate assessment methods, and also to reflect on what they are doing and why they are doing it. This improvement in alignment helps to improve the assessment item under review as well as others within the same unit.
- b) The project identified better communication between academics, professional and policy staff involved in quality of assurance of a course of study.
- c) Network of linkages have been made externally to those involved in the project that has stimulated further discussion and activity around assuring standards in other units and courses independent of the ERoS process.
- d) The use of low cost video web conferencing and shared online storage of review materials made for both an effective and efficient communication method between internal and external academic and administrative teams.

4. Personal and professional development for those involved in the ERoS process has been well evidenced by those taking part in the project especially for individuals that have not carried out similar processes before. It is often the case that different staff are involved in the processes of External Professional and Discipline Accreditation, Registration and external referencing. Academic feedback put a high value on the positive reinforcement of their assessment strategy from the external review and the validity of their judgments made on student achievement of course level learning outcomes. The broader teaching team also benefited from the review process as it promotes a shared understanding with which to calibrate standards. These professional development opportunities apply equally to professional staff involved in project administration as well as academic staff undertaking the peer review. Overall this capacity building within participating institutions will lead to the creation and development of sustainable communities of practice.

Sustainable practice will need to be embedded within course teams that actively work together and reflect on course quality and student outcomes. How coherently course teams work together may vary between institutions, even from course to course in one institution, and will impact on the outcomes of referencing processes and ultimately improvements to the student experience.

Effective course teams are also an important focal point for recognising and celebrating the achievements acknowledged in reviews.

5. The battle between Effectiveness vs. Efficiency and Sustainability:

- a) There was greater quality enhancement effectiveness for those involved in the triad pilots as they could see two standards in relation to their own and take from both of these. This has to be balanced by the loss in efficiency of administration between more partners. The transaction costs are not linear and diminish as outlined in (6.1 Cost of External Referencing) and in a more systemised process could be reduced still further.
- b) The quality of the review materials supplied and how well they scaffolded the student work and assessment item back to the learning outcomes was a key factor in reviews. Pivotal discussion and feedback centred on the item e.g “assessment rubric” which articulated the performance standards against which the student achievement standards could be evaluated. Where this was lacking or not well described then both the effectiveness and efficiency of the review process suffered. However, it was not always possible or required to supply materials that framed each assessment item – e.g the formative assessments, teaching activities and data analytics on past performance. This discussion of the context of the assessment item was best carried out in video web and telephone conferencing.
- c) The pilots where possible aimed at looking at assessment methods that were not just paper based, and that were appropriate for the stated learning outcome of the discipline. Thus a physical portfolio, fashion item and video samples of student work were utilised. Here it became clear that administration costs increased in terms of difficulties in redaction or sharing of such items. But in the main the effectiveness of the review was not diminished by having some proxy of the item e.g photographs provided three differentiated samples were supplied. However, capturing the student evidence is not always routine and for more challenging assessments this could put those at risk as seen at too high a workload – e.g. oral assessments in languages.
- d) Administration of the ERoS process is potentially the area where the battle is won or lost. Under 6.4 Coordination and administrative support costs, the ongoing roles and responsibilities have been summarised which may be effectively deployed centrally or on a more devolved arrangement. The importance of this support is evident when dealing internally with key contacts such a course leaders and with contacts in partner institutions during the matchmaking process, which the ERoS experience found to be time consuming and complex. It is for this reason that one clear outcome is for coordination and administrative support costs to be met (section 6.4) and the

establishment of a suitable Online Peer Review Tool (OPRT) with functionality to manage the process.

Outputs:

1. Presentation of project outcomes, findings and recommendations at dissemination meetings, online institutional sites¹², and within a formal project report to include an identified strategy to leverage project outcomes and achieve impact
2. Creation of tested and improved process information, tools and resources that effectively support and simplify the task for staff involved in external referencing and meet the requirement as set out in the new HESF Threshold Standards (2015)
3. The establishment of a set of good practice principles to guide further work in the area and a clear contribution to the establishment of a sustainable sector wide model for peer review of assessment and teaching quality through establishing a College of Peers and a national online benchmarking tool

¹² https://ctl.curtin.edu.au/teaching_learning_practice/assessment/external_referencing.cfm
<http://www.uow.edu.au/curriculum-transformation/aqc/EROS/index.html>

5. Resource Implications and Scalability of the Process

Cost of External Referencing

Implementing the external reference process is a significant investment over a five-year quality improvement cycle used by many institutions. The scale is evident in the number of higher education courses offered by institutions collaborating in the EROs project, which varies from 200 to 500.

The EROs project tracked the hours of academic staff participating in reviews using standardised electronic portable document format (PDF) templates (see Appendix 2, pages 9 and 10) to gather data to inform the cost of academic time per course per university. There is additional administrative cost in scheduling and supporting reviews that are addressed in 6.2 below.

Factors affecting time spent by individual academic staff:

- by discipline
- the university systems available to support such processes
- the duration of discussions
- additional information and clarifications sought
- staff with external review or similar external professional accreditation experience
- reflection on the internal quality assurance of the course. For example, alignment of learning outcomes and assessment tasks, availability of rubrics

Table 3 provides the average hours for dyads and triads. This was used to calculate the cost in academic staff time per course per university. The salary point used, the RMIT hourly rate for an ongoing mid-point level C appointment, represented an agreed “middle ground” academic cost for the four participating institutions (this in no way proposes a minimum appointment level of academic who should undertake reviews).

Table 3 - Hours and cost of Dyad and Triad reviews per course

Hours for a Dyad	Academic Hourly Rate#	Cost per Course review
14.73*	\$78.99	\$1163

Hours for a Triad	Academic Salary Hourly Rate#	Cost per Course review
18.5	\$78.99	\$1461

#Based on the hourly rate for a mid-point Level C appointment at RMIT including on costs at 27%
*8.25 hours for a one-way review

The figures show that the cost to a university in academic time per course per review is \$1163 for a dyad, and \$1461 per triad. The difference in cost between dyads and triads is 20%. It is apparent that with triads there are economies of scale in:

- the time taken to prepare material and samples of assessment. No more so for a dyad than a triad
- web video conference discussions throughout the process which happen jointly
- discussion of draft reports

The time difference in triads relates to reading and analysis time for reviewers across two sets of course materials and student assessment samples, and preparation of two reports. There is additional administration time involved in organising and coordinating triads as opposed to dyads or one way reviews.

As noted, a number of factors affected the efficiency of the review process including discipline. The average costs indicated above may vary significantly in disciplines such as the studio arts, where more than one staff member in an institution may participate in the review process, and artefacts such as creative works are the samples of student assessment.

Resourcing and planning implications

Using the cost for dyads and triads in Table 3, we are able to project in Table 4 the cost of reviews annually for an institution based on the number of higher education courses offered. To arrive at the number of annual reviews, it divides the number of courses offered by a university over a five-year period (the standard quality review cycle). In practice, institutional planning may not run out this way, but it is a reasonable way to arrive at an indicative cost.

Table 4 – Indicative annual cost of course reviews based on a five-year quality review cycle

No of Higher Education courses offered by a university	No of course reviews per year over a 5-year quality review cycle	\$ per year if undertaken as a dyad review	\$ per year if undertaken as a triad review
200	40	\$46,520	\$58,440
250	50	\$58,150	\$73,050
300	60	\$69,780	\$87,668
350	70	\$81,410	\$102,270
400	80	\$93,040	\$116,880
450	90	\$104,670	\$131,490
500	100	\$116,300	\$146,100

(\$ = AUD)

The indicative annual institutional cost for a dyad ranges from \$46,520 to \$116,300, and \$58,440 to \$146,100 for a triad. The number of reviews per year range from 40 to 100.

In addition to the indicative annual cost, Table 4 illustrates the volume of work that external referencing will involve. Both annually and over the five yearly quality cycle the work requires institution-wide planning and prioritisation to be effectively implemented.

It is important to note that the figures above indicate the requests for review of courses by an individual university. All institutions will be asked to reciprocate and undertake reviews of other institutions courses.

Prior to being discontinued, the “My University” website showed there were about 7,000 undergraduate and 7,000 postgraduate courses offered by institutions in Australia, some 14,000 courses altogether. Using the method in **Table 4** above, this would average out at about 2,800 reviews sector wide per year.

It is acknowledged that within individual institutions there are many courses with embedded qualifications, and in similar discipline areas. However, this fact is unlikely to significantly reduce the total number of reviews, nor the volume of work in external referencing.

Honorarium for reviewers

Honorariums are already a practice in parts of the sector. Both the Group of Eight and Innovative Research Institutions provide reviewers in the external referencing process an honorarium of \$600. Using this figure, the annual cost for a university requesting 40 reviews would add an extra \$24,000, and if undertaking 100 reviews, \$60,000 annually.

While it may appear useful, and an incentive for reviewers to offer such nominal honorariums, as a sector wide practice it most likely will be patchy, and given to volume of work annually, costly and cumbersome from an administrative perspective. It may operate more effectively as a protocol across the sector through Universities Australia, that external referencing between institutions is pro bono work. The intention of the new standards is that course quality improvement work should be part of normal work of institutions (business as usual), a common sense position that it is work we should always have been doing in one form or another.

This does not obviate the need for inclusion of such work in annual work plans of academic staff.

Coordination and administrative support costs

It was mentioned earlier that there are additional administrative tasks and cost associated with the external referencing. A significant amount of administrative time was invested in establishing the processes and resources for the ERoS project. There are administrative tasks, noted in *4.4. Managing the Process*, that will be ongoing as external referencing becomes routine work in institutions:

Position 1 - Administrative Support, at least 0.5FT depending on the number of courses (Higher Education Worker Level \$80,968- \$87,642).

The tasks identified here are:

- Process expert on external referencing
- Planning and scheduling reviews on an annual basis
- Escalate issues that put a review at risk
- Conducts professional development workshops with academic staff of courses scheduled for external referencing
- Liaise with partner institutions to identify relevant discipline staff to partner with
- Ensure reviews are conducted, meet timelines, are completed and recommendations actioned

- Ensure the systematic documentation of reviews, storage and retrieval as required
- Report on outcomes of reviews annually with relevant metrics including:
 - course quality issues commonly arising
 - improvements to the external referencing process
 - annual reports to Academic Board/ Senate are provided
- System development, implementation and support

Position 2 – Senior Quality/ Teaching and Learning oversight, at least 0.3FT depending on the number of courses.

- Senior oversight at University/ Faculty wide level
- Address issues and problems that may arise in the course of external referencing
- Assess and report on the quality improvements made through external referencing
- Oversee University/ Faculty wide improvements to the process
- Report to the DVCE on outcomes of the process.
- Provide reports to the Academic Board

It is acknowledged that some institutions will have centralised approaches to the implementation of these roles, while others will prefer a devolved model at faculty level.

It was earlier noted that external referencing was one of three quality improvement processes required under TEQSA standards. The other two are frequent ongoing review and comprehensive review. As a quality cycle the three are shown in Figure 2.

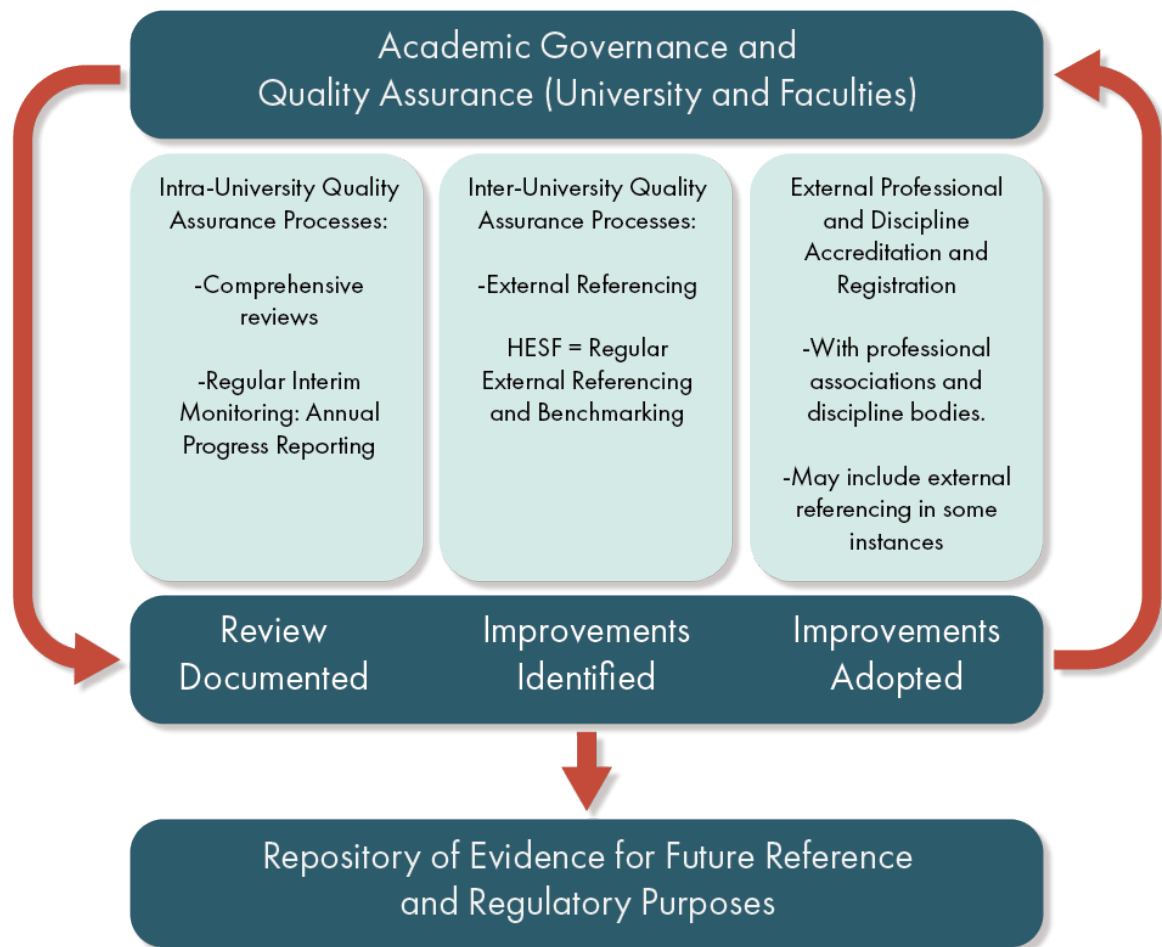


Figure 2: Quality improvement processes shown within a quality cycle

In developing roles that addresses external referencing, it would be sensible for institutions to take account of all of the quality improvement processes indicated in Figure 2. It is apparent that institutions will choose to undertake external referencing either as part comprehensive course review or as a separate process. Irrespective of the approach chosen there will be a requirement do so in a quality framework of a clear and consistent practice, documented outcomes and evidence of how feedback has been used to improve the quality of courses and consequently the student experience. Retention of evidence will be required over 7 years, the duration of TEQSA registration.

Given the number of higher education courses in some institutions, the importance of automated systems and data to support external referencing and other course quality improvement processes. To this end the ERoS project is participating in the development of an Online Peer Review Tool (OPRT) occurring under the sponsorship of the National Peer Review Network through Education Services Australia (ESA). On request we have made available our templates and documented

processes for the testing, and two members of the EROS team are on the National Reference Group.

6. Proposed Improvements

During the evaluation phase of the ERoS project, improvements to the information for academic staff, templates and process have been suggested. Most staff indicated that the process was simple and easy to follow. However, the documentation provided gave the impression of a bigger process than it was. Some pairing down and simplification of the documentation has therefore been undertaken.

The revised documentation from the ERoS process is attached in Appendix 1. It makes the process more pertinent to an ongoing external referencing process than to the trial process. In particular, the report on the institutions response to an external reference should accommodate triangulated reviews more effectively.

The ERoS pilot proceeded under a memorandum of understanding signed by a Deputy Vice-Chancellor of each participating institution. It would be impractical for this to occur routinely. We would propose that signing the “Participant Agreement” at course level should be sufficient to allow external referencing to proceed between institutions.

It is important that the academic community understand the way in which external referencing fits into the quality cycle of their institution, and the primary importance it has as a means of course improvement, and hence the student experience.

7. Conclusion

With the January 1, 2017 deadline for implementation of the HESF fast approaching there is increased interest and activity in the sector on external referencing and benchmarking processes. This is apparent with the group of Innovative Research Universities, who have employed a project officer to support the scaling up of their processes. ERoS has now presented at the National Peer Review Network conferences across the country and our processes and templates are in demand.

There is an acknowledgement among other universities who have trialled processes of the significant investment of resources required to scale up and meet all requirements of the HESF as they apply to course quality. ERoS is one of the few projects to have documented the resource requirements, and to have considered the level of traffic across the sector the HESF gives rise to.

It is crucial that this investment achieves what it sets out to do - improve student attainment standards in the sector. Central to this is the way in which we engage the expertise of our academic communities in a process they feel has integrity, an important learning from the ERoS experience.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1- ERoS Accompanying Guide, Information and Template

Sections

Section 1 - Overview

Section 2 - Process for triads and dyads

Section 3 - Review Materials Checklist

Section 4 - Guidance on the selection of student work

Templates

Template 1 - Participant agreement

Template 2 – Report template (provided separately)

Glossary

Acknowledgements

Appendix 2 - Relevant TEQSA Standards

8. Appendix 1 - ERoS Accompanying Guide, Information and Template

Section 1 - Overview

Purpose and principles

This guide describes a collaborative process for external referencing of academic achievement standards, where peers who are acknowledged discipline or professional experts, review and report on the assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes.

The design of this process was driven by the following key principles:

1. **Effective** - Supports both the quality enhancement and quality assurance of courses and units
2. **Efficient** - Efficiently enables the external referencing of assessment methods and grading of students' attainment of learning outcomes across comparable courses of study
3. **Transparent and open** - The process engages multiple perspectives and facilitates critical and open dialogue between teaching staff across comparable courses to support consensus building around standards of student learning outcomes
4. **Capability Building** - Contributes to the professional development of participating staff and discipline communities of practice
5. **Sustainable** - Provides sustainable end-to-end process for external referencing that can be operationalised and used routinely by participating institutions.

This referencing process focuses on:

- Course and Unit Learning Outcomes¹³
- Assessment methods

¹³ Course: A collection of units of study leading to an award or qualification. Also known as a program.
Unit: An individual unit of study. Also known as a subject or course.

External Referencing of Standards

- Student Achievement Standards

Background – The ERoS Project

External Referencing of Standards Project (ERoS) developed and piloted the end-to-end process and resources provided in this guide. The project, a collaboration between RMIT, Curtin University, QUT and University of Wollongong, aimed to address the quality enhancement of assessment and student achievement standards, balanced with quality assurance against the Higher Education Standards Framework. The ERoS process focused on assuring student attainment standards of academic standards through referencing of coursework program (and unit) learning outcomes using randomly selected and previously marked assessment items from selected final year units.

The project drew on academic and project expertise of the four participating institutions and adapted methodologies and resources developed and tested in the OLT national project titled “Assuring Learning and Teaching Standards through Inter-Institutional Peer Review and Moderation”¹⁴. It also drew on processes implemented by the Group of Eight Research Universities, and Innovative Research Universities, and included expert advice from the National Peer Review Network OLT project team. The final project report and resources drew on information, feedback and views of pilot participants. The project led to the establishment of inter-university partnerships that can be utilised on an on-going basis for future external referencing activities. It also contributed to the establishment of a sustainable sector wide model for peer review of assessment and teaching quality being established through a College of Peers and a national online benchmarking tool.

¹⁴ Krause, K.-L., Scott, G., Aubin, K., Alexander, H., Angelo, T., Campbell, S., . . . Pattison, P. (2014). Assuring Learning and Teaching Standards through Inter-Institutional Peer Review and Moderation: Final Report of the Project: Retrieved from University of Western Sydney website: http://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/576916/External_Report_2014_Web_3.pdf.

External Referencing of Standards

Section 2 - Process for Triads and Dyads

Once the courses and institutions participating in the external referencing process have been matched and confirmed it is recommended the following steps be undertaken.

Key steps

1. The participating course leaders through consultation nominate a final year unit and discipline staff in each course to be involved in the external referencing process. It is recommended at a minimum the leader for selected unit is nominated. The relevant course leader may also choose to be involved in the referencing process.
2. All staff agreeing to participate are asked to sign a participant agreement covering confidentiality and ethical behaviour (see attached Template - Participant Agreement).
3. A cross-institutional group is formed from the nominated discipline staff from the participating courses.
4. Each group conducts a preliminary or introductory conversation of a fairly informal nature in order to:
 - share their expectations of the peer referencing process
 - provide a brief introduction to the units and assessment selected for review using unit outlines to inform the discussion
 - discuss any reservations they may have and generally get to know each other prior to beginning the review process
 - confirm timeline and key dates (e.g. draft reports and review meeting, final reports).

It is recommended that this preliminary conversation be undertaken using a free web based video conferencing tool so that people can see each other. Distributing unit outlines prior to the meeting is also useful.
5. Each participating institution provides the review materials for selected unit to the other participating institutions. See the Review Materials checklist in this guide and on page 2 of the report template.
6. Participants each individually review student work samples and background curriculum material provided as follows:
 - Institution A and B review C's set of curriculum materials and work samples
 - Institution B and C review A's set of curriculum materials and work samples
 - Institution C and A review B's set of curriculum materials and work samples

Notes:

Ideally a triad of three participating institutions (A, B and C) would be involved to enable multiple perspectives, robust discussion and increased transparency, however there may be circumstances where only two institutions can be involved (A and B). It should also be noted that there are additional organisational and time considerations associated with triads.

During any stage of the process, reviewers can request more information, or clarification of information provided.

External Referencing of Standards

7. Each reviewer drafts responses to the questions on the report template and notes areas where any additional information might be provided by the unit leader that would further inform the reviewer's understanding of the assessment context.
8. These draft reports are provided back to the originating institution and then the group meets (in person or online) to conduct feedback conversations on each set of materials reviewed guided by the following points.
 - a) Group provides general comment on the overall reviewing experience
 - b) For each reviewed unit a collegial, robust discussion is undertaken. Following is a suggested structure for this discussion:
 - Invited the unit leader to comment on the draft report and their own review experience.
 - Reviewer/s raise questions emerging from the reviewing process (e.g. the conditions under which the assessment task was performed, how the task related to similar tasks in other units likely to have been undertaken by the same students etc.).
 - Reviewer/s provide feedback on the appropriateness of judgements. Feedback should be supported by explanatory comment regardless of whether judgements were deemed appropriate or not.
 - Reviewer/s comment on areas of strength and areas likely to benefit from further attention. Reviewers who have identified several points may wish to limit these to the 3 considered most important so as not to overwhelm the person receiving feedback.
 - Staff from the reviewed institution are invited to provide further comments or ask questions throughout the discussion.
 - The main points raised during the conversation are summarised by the group.
9. Reviewers individually complete their external referencing report that is returned to their institutional coordinator.

Final reports are discussed between the relevant course and unit leader who participated in the external referencing process. Any errors of fact in the reports may be corrected at this stage. Responsive action is determined, briefly documented on the template and followed up according to school or faculty processes.

External Referencing of Standards

Section 3: Review Materials Checklist

(for the institution requesting the external referencing)

The requesting institution will provide the reviewer with the following information:

General points

- ☐ An overall course or study plan structure which positions the unit being reviewed. (A curriculum map, showing the way the ULOs are mapped to the CLOs, is helpful if available)
- ☐ List of Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)
- ☐ Specific CLOs relevant to the Unit being reviewed

For the selected unit

- ☐ Unit outline
- ☐ Unit Learning Outcomes (ULOs)
- ☐ A schedule of learning for the unit showing key learning and assessment over the teaching period

For the selected assessment task

- ☐ Information provided to students setting out the assessment task requirements and/or questions
- ☐ Weighting of the assessment
- ☐ Assessment Rubrics, marking guides, or criteria sheet

Grading

- ☐ Explanation of the grading scheme as it applies to the samples of student work and explanations of nomenclature

Samples of student work

Please read Section 4 for information on how to select samples of student work

- ☐ Samples of de-identified student work provided

Section 4 - Guidance on the selection of student work for external referencing.

Student work selected for external referencing should be able to demonstrate some of the course learning outcomes (CLOs), i.e. those that characterise the knowledge and capabilities students should have achieved by the completion of their course. (It is recognised that samples will not be able to cover the full range of possible outcomes.) It would be unusual to encounter this problem but avoid selecting samples that might have intellectual property implications (e.g. commercial-in-confidence). Samples should be selected from defined grade ranges, based on the final mark achieved as described below. Within these grade ranges, sampling is conducted at random. Student work must be de-identified prior to the external referencing process, but otherwise the work is left intact, complete with any annotations made by the original assessor. (If assessor comments/marks are on a separate document, such as a rubric, this should be included alongside the student work.)

Stratified Random Sampling

To enable a focus on threshold standards, and to provide a consistent format for the comparison of student work across institutions that may use different grade band boundaries, samples for external referencing should represent a random selection of assessed work to include the mark ranges as follows:

1. **A minimal pass** (selecting a sample at random from student work that achieved the minimum pass mark up to no more than 5% above this. If there is no student work that falls into this category, the work with the lowest passing mark should be submitted for review.)
2. **A fail** (selecting a sample at random from student work that did not meet the pass mark, but did not fail by more than 10% below the minimum pass mark. If there is no student work that falls into this category, then the work with the highest failing mark should be submitted.) If there are no failing students then a second sample from the 'minimal pass' category should be added.
3. **A grade greater than a pass** (selecting a sample at random from student work that achieved a mark that is higher than that which falls within the grade range associated with a 'Pass'. [e.g. Credit, Distinction, High Distinction] If there are no students achieving a strong pass then do not submit work in this category.)

The procedure above is designed to produce at least two and normally three samples of work for review. Work should be selected using some form of random selection procedure (i.e. selecting a sample at random from a sub-list of eligible samples, or selecting samples at random from the full cohort until the three sample criteria are met.

External Referencing of Standards

Selection of student work examples:

Example 1

Institution X has five grade bands within their institution, as follows:

High Distinction	80-100
Distinction	70-79
Credit	60-69
Pass	50-59
Fail	0-49

Unit X1 has the following distribution of marks for the final assessments:

Student	Mark	Grade Band
1	14	Fail
2	23	Fail
3	40	Fail
4	43	Fail
5	45	Fail
6	50	Pass
7	52	Pass
8	55	Pass
9	58	Pass
10	59	Pass
11	60	Credit
12	63	Credit
13	67	Credit
14	65	Credit
15	66	Credit
16	69	Credit
17	70	Distinction
18	71	Distinction
19	76	Distinction
20	80	High Distinction
21	86	High Distinction

One sample of assessed work for external referencing should be randomly selected from within the:

1. green strata (representing a minimal pass)
2. red strata (representing a fail)
3. blue strata (representing a strong pass)

If there had been no failing students, then two samples would have been drawn from the green strata.

Example 2

Institution Y also has five grade bands, but with different boundaries compared with University X:

High Distinction	85-100
Distinction	75-84
Credit	65-74
Pass	50-64
Fail	0-49

Unit Y1 has the following distribution of marks for the final assessments:

Student	Percent	Grade Band
1	29	Fail
2	32	Fail
3	36	Fail
4	50	Pass
5	53	Pass
6	55	Pass
7	58	Pass
8	59	Pass
9	60	Pass
10	63	Pass
11	67	Credit
12	65	Credit
13	66	Credit
14	70	Credit
15	71	Credit
16	76	Distinction
17	80	Distinction
18	86	High Distinction

One sample of assessed work for external referencing should be randomly selected from within the:

1. green strata (representing a minimal pass)
2. red strata (representing a fail – but in this case there are no students with a score between 40-50%, so the highest failing mark [36%] is selected instead.)
3. blue strata (representing a strong pass)

If there had been no students scoring 65% or more, then only samples 1) and 2) would be selected and put forward for review.

External Referencing of Standards

Template 1: Participant Agreement

1. I have had the referencing process explained to me and have read the information and guidelines provided.
2. I agree to participate in the referencing process as described
3. I understand my role in the process is to provide collaborating institutions with the required unit information for which I am unit leader. I will use the checklist of information to complete this. I will also be available to speak with staff of the other institutions to develop the relationship necessary for the review, and to provide clarification and advice as required.
4. In turn I will be required to review the unit or units of the other institutions involved in the external referencing process using the template report format and associated guidelines provided.
5. I understand that if I have questions about the referencing process I can contact the institution contact.
6. My participation in the referencing process will give me access to confidential information including samples of de-identified student assessment tasks. I will use all material and information provided to me only for the purpose of participating in the referencing process (and for no other purpose).
7. I will respect the views and opinions of others during the process

Name:

Date:

Signature

External Referencing of Standards

Glossary of terms and acronyms

Academic standards: refers to both learning and teaching standards. Teaching standards are understood to encompass “process” or “delivery” standards, while learning standards refer to “outcome standards” which describe the “nature and levels of student attainment” (TEQSA, 2011, p. 3).

Assessment: a process to determine a student’s achievement of expected learning outcomes and may include a range of written and oral methods and practice or demonstration. It is expected to fairly, validly and reliably measure student performance of intended learning outcomes. Valid assessment refers to the explicit and clear alignment between intended learning outcomes and the assessment methods used to measure student achievement of those outcomes.

Assessment Rubric or Guide: A tool designed to measure the level of student achievement against consistent criteria and to award scored and/or graded outcomes. Assessment guides usually have three elements:

- Criteria for assessment
- Scored/graded outcome
- Descriptors of the performance criteria for each scored or graded outcome

Another commonly used term is ‘**Assessment Criteria sheet**’.

Example of an Assessment Rubric:

	Scored/Graded Outcome	High Distinction	Distinction	Credit	Pass	Fail
Criteria		Example of Descriptors of the performance criteria for scored or graded outcome.				
	Thesis	Clearly stated, concise and consistent				
	Argument	Logical and well evidenced				
	Originality					

External Referencing of Standards

Assessment Task: illustrative task or performance opportunity that closely targets defined learning outcomes, allowing students to demonstrate their learning and capabilities. Assessment tasks include, but are not limited to essays, tests, examinations, laboratory, clinical or field practicums, projects, compilations, productions, presentations, performances, web-based discussions and participation in forums.

Assessment Weight: the number of marks or % value attributed to a particular assessment item, which should reflect the relative importance of that assessment

Assurance: the process of ensuring that activities and outcomes meet an agreed standard.

Course: whole-of-degree program. **A course is** collection of units of study leading to an award or qualification. Also known as **program**.

Course Learning Outcomes: the expression of the set of knowledge, skills and the application of the knowledge and skills a student has acquired and is able to demonstrate as a result of learning across the whole program.

Coursework Program: Those taught programs of students. Higher Degree Research programs are generally not considered coursework programs.

End to End Process – A term used to refer to the beginning and end points of a methodology. It can refer to an academic methodology such as the EROS project, service delivery, administrative and business processes.

External Referencing: External review of all, or aspects, of a program, unit of a program, or student achievement standards by a peer from another institution who is an acknowledged discipline or professional expert.

Grade Descriptors: describe performance at the subject level, but may be indicative of levels of performance of certain types of assessment task (especially project work, reports and other extended writing tasks).

Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) – These are the standards enacted under the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency Act, and are binding on institutions.

Leader: The person who has responsibility for the development, implementation and ongoing review of the courses or unit.

Marking: the act of assessing individual assessment components, generating a score and/or grade, and feedback, as appropriate.

Program: whole-of-degree program. **A program is** collection of units of study leading to an award or qualification. Also known as **course**.

Quality: is fitness for purpose/fitness of purpose and performance to an agreed standard.

External Referencing of Standards

Referencing: see External Referencing

Reliability: trustworthiness of assessment, the extent to which the grade awarded by one marker aligns with that awarded by another marker. **Standards:** statements describing the level or quality of student performance of criteria, in an assessment task.

Unit: an individual unit taken as part of a whole-of-degree program. A single component of a qualification, or a stand-alone unit, that has been approved/accredited. A unit may also be called a 'course', 'subject', or 'module'.

Unit Learning Outcomes: the expression of the set of knowledge, skills and the application of the knowledge and skills a student has acquired and is able to demonstrate as a result of learning in an individual unit/ subject.

Validity: in establishing outcomes which are the focus of assessment, validity refers to the process of confirming, on evidence and against a range of agreed reference points, that what is being given focus on in a course or subject is both relevant and desirable. In terms of the process of assessment, validity refers to the use of assessment methods that are 'fit for purpose' – that is, they are shown to be the best way to measure the development of the capabilities and competencies set down for achievement in a particular course or subject.

Acronyms

AQF – Australian Qualification Framework

CLOs – Course Learning Outcome

EROS – External Referencing Of Standards Project

HESF - Higher Education Standards Framework

TEQSA – Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

ULOs– Unit Learning Outcomes

Acknowledgements

The ERoS Project team has drawn on a number of projects, resources and methodologies for our work. We wish to acknowledge:

Kraus, K-L., Scott, G., et al (2014). Assuring Learning and Teaching Standards through Inter-Institutional Peer Review and Moderation.

<http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-assuring-learning-teaching-standards-inter-institutional-peer-review>

D. Royce Sadler (2012): Assuring academic achievement standards: from moderation to calibration, *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 2012, 1–15.

Executive Director, Innovative Research Universities Secretariat, Conor King, for permission to draw on resources developed for their Academic Calibration Project.

Hancock, P., Freeman, M., Abraham, A., De Lange, P. Howieson, B, O'Connell, B., & Watty, K. (2015) *Achievement Matters: External Peer Review of Accounting Learning Standards*, Final report.

www.achievementmatters.com.au

National External Peer Review of Assessment Network Project (2014).

<http://www.utas.edu.au/student-evaluation-review-and-reporting-unit/nprn>

The Group of Eight Quality Verification System.

The unit coordinators and course leaders from Business, French, Fashion, Psychology, Marketing, Education, Engineering and Nursing and all past and present members of the ERoS team who have contributed to and supported this work.

External Referencing of Standards Report

The information on this form may be published by the requesting University.

Date

Details of institution requesting the external referencing

Contact Name:
College/Faculty:
Discipline/Professional area:
Area of expertise sought:

Details of institution undertaking the external

Reviewer's Name:
College/Faculty:
Discipline/Professional area:
Area of expertise:

Unit and Course details

Prepare one of these reports for each unit or capstone project reviewed.

Unit (code, title and discipline area):
Course (title):

Statement of potential conflicts of interest

To be completed by the reviewer.

For example, being involved in collaborative teaching, research, or consultancy work with colleagues teaching in the units being reviewed.

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Acknowledgement: This template was developed as part of the External Referencing of Standards Project (ERoS Project), a collaboration between the RMIT, Curtin University, University of Wollongong and QUT.

Notes for reviewers

Preparing reports

Within 3 weeks (or as otherwise agreed) of receiving the relevant information and materials, you are required to submit the attached completed report to the university requesting the external referencing report.

Report structure and content

Please complete all of Part A: Sections 1 to 3 of the report. If there are additional comments or recommendations you wish to make, document these in Section 4 of the report.

Language of the report

In writing the report you should be aware that it may be discussed widely within departments and schools, and in forums that have a range of participants including students. Comments may include commendations and suggested areas for change.

The language used in the report should reflect:

- sensitivity to the peer review nature of the process
- cognisance of a potentially wide audience for the report, for example accrediting bodies and university level committees

General points

1. The university being reviewed will own the copyright of all the materials produced in relation to the review.
2. You will assign all present and future rights relating to the reports and any other materials created in relation to your role as an External Reviewer to the university being reviewed. You will also waive any rights including moral rights in connection with those materials.
3. The university being reviewed will make reasonable endeavours to ensure the accurate reproduction of material and information provided by you; all other warranties and undertakings are excluded, including liability for direct or indirect loss to you.
4. You give consent to the university being reviewed to publish any part of your report, electronically or in hard-copy, in internal or publicly accessible websites, reports and/or brochures.

Notes for requesting university

Selection of units

The unit selected for review should be from the final year or stage of the course and the assessment tasks put up for review should NOT be multi-stage ones – eg. those that contain several integrated assessment tasks.

Checklist for the university requesting the external referencing

The requesting university will provide the reviewer with the following information:

General points

- ☐ An overall course structure which positions the unit being reviewed (a curriculum map, showing the way the ULOs are mapped to the CLOs, is helpful if available)
- ☐ List of Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)
- ☐ Specific CLOs relevant to the Unit being reviewed.

For the selected unit

- ☐ Unit outline
- ☐ Unit Learning Outcomes (ULOs)
- ☐ A schedule of learning for the unit

For the selected assessment task

- ☐ Information provided to students setting out the assessment task requirements and/or questions
- ☐ Weighting of the assessment
- ☐ Assessment Guide (e.g. Assessment Rubrics, Grading Guides, or Criteria sheets).

Grading

Explanation of the grading scheme as it applies to the samples of student work and explanations of nomenclature.

Samples of student work

Please read Section 4 in the accompanying guide for information on how to select samples of student work

- ☐ Samples of de-identified student work provided.

The report is divided into Part A and B:

PART A: For Reviewers to complete

- Section 1: Course (CLOs) and Unit (ULOs) Learning Outcomes
- Section 2: Assessment
- Section 3: Student Achievement Standards
- Section 4: Other matters you wish to raise

PART B: Response of the requesting University to the external referencing

PART A: Section 1 | Course (CLOs) and Unit (ULOs) Learning Outcomes

1. Are the Unit Learning Outcomes aligned with the relevant Course Learning Outcomes?

Yes	Yes, but	No, but	No
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Comments / suggested changes.

Note: responses should pertain to the course selected for external referencing and not other courses the unit may be taught in.

2. Are the Unit Learning Outcomes appropriate for a final stage Unit at this AQF qualification level?

Yes	Yes, but	No, but	No
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Comments / suggested changes.

Note: responses should pertain to the course selected for external referencing and not other courses the unit may be taught in.

PART A: Section 2 | Assessment

1. Does the assessment task enable students to demonstrate attainment of the relevant ULOs and relevant CLOs?

Yes	Yes, but	No, but	No

Comments / suggested changes.

Note: responses should pertain to the course selected for external referencing and not other courses the unit may be taught in.

2. Is the description of the performance standards (e.g. the marking guide/marketing criteria/assessment rubric/ annotated work samples) appropriate to the specified ULOs and relevant CLOs?)

Yes	Yes, but	No, but	No

Comments / suggested changes.

PART A: Section 3 | Student Achievement

1. Do you agree that the grades awarded reflect the level of student attainment?

Yes	Yes, but	No, but	No

Comments / suggested changes.

Note: please refer to the grading scheme and descriptors provided for this University and respond to each sample assessment. Please contain your comments to the grades awarded in the samples provided.

Sample A:

Sample B:

Sample C:

2. Based on your review, do you consider the methods of assessment are capable of confirming that all relevant specified CLOs and ULOs are achieved?

Yes	No

Comments / suggested changes.

Add comments here.

PART A: Section 4 | Other matters you wish to raise

1. Are there other matters not covered in Parts 1, 2 and 3 above that you wish to draw to the attention of the course team?

Yes

No

Please provide brief details.

Add details here

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PART B: Section | Response of the requesting University to the external referencing
(to be completed by the Course and Unit Coordinator)

Priorities for implementation from the review	What are the anticipated enhancements to the quality of the course and learning experience of students?	Date for completion	Responsibility

9. Appendix 2 – TEQSA Standards relevant to external referencing (from the standards to come into effect on January 1, 2017).

1.4 Learning Outcomes and Assessment

1. The expected learning outcomes for each course of study are specified, consistent with the level and field of education of the qualification awarded, and informed by national and international comparators.
2. The specified learning outcomes for each course of study encompass discipline-related and generic outcomes, including:
 - a. specific knowledge and skills and their application that characterise the field(s) of education or disciplines involved
 - b. generic skills and their application in the context of the field(s) of education or disciplines involved
 - c. knowledge and skills required for employment and further study related to the course of study, including those required to be eligible to seek registration to practise where applicable, and
 - d. skills in independent and critical thinking suitable for life-long learning.
3. Methods of assessment are consistent with the learning outcomes being assessed, are capable of confirming that all specified learning outcomes are achieved and that grades awarded reflect the level of student attainment.
4. On completion of a course of study, students have demonstrated the learning outcomes specified for the course of study, whether assessed at unit level, course level, or in combination.

3.1 Course Design

1. The design for each course of study is specified and the specification includes:
 - a. the qualification(s) to be awarded on completion
 - b. structure, duration and modes of delivery
 - c. the units of study (or equivalent) that comprise the course of study

- d. entry requirements and pathways
- e. expected learning outcomes, methods of assessment and indicative student workload
- f. compulsory requirements for completion
- g. exit pathways, articulation arrangements, pathways to further learning, and

ERoS. for a course of study leading to a Bachelor Honours, Masters or Doctoral qualification, includes the proportion and nature of research or research-related study in the course.

2. The content and learning activities of each course of study engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry consistent with the level of study and the expected learning outcomes, including:
 - a. current knowledge and scholarship in relevant academic disciplines
 - b. study of the underlying theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the academic disciplines or fields of education or research represented in the course, and
 - c. emerging concepts that are informed by recent scholarship, current research findings and, where applicable, advances in practice.
3. Teaching and learning activities are arranged to foster progressive and coherent achievement of expected learning outcomes throughout each course of study.
4. Each course of study is designed to enable achievement of expected learning outcomes regardless of a student's place of study or the mode of delivery.
5. Where professional accreditation of a course of study is required for graduates to be eligible to practise, the course of study is accredited and continues to be accredited by the relevant professional body.

5.1 Course Approval and Accreditation

1. There are processes for internal approval of the delivery of a course of study, or, where a provider has authority to self-accredit, internal accreditation, of all courses of study leading to a higher education qualification.
2. Course approval and self-accreditation processes are overseen by peak institutional academic governance processes and they are applied consistently to all courses of study, before the courses are first offered and during re-approval or re-accreditation of the courses.
3. A course of study is approved or accredited, or re-approved or re-accredited, only when:
 - a. the course of study meets, and continues to meet, the applicable Standards of the *Higher Education Standards Framework*

- b. the decision to (re-)approve or (re-)accredit a course of study is informed by overarching academic scrutiny of the course of study that is competent to assess the design, delivery and assessment of the course of study independently of the staff directly involved in those aspects of the course, and
- c. the resources required to deliver the course as approved or accredited will be available when needed.

5.3 Monitoring, Review and Improvement

1. All accredited courses of study are subject to periodic (at least every seven years) comprehensive reviews that are overseen by peak academic governance processes and include external referencing or other benchmarking activities.
2. A comprehensive review includes the design and content of each course of study, the expected learning outcomes, the methods for assessment of those outcomes, the extent of students' achievement of learning outcomes, and also takes account of emerging developments in the field of education, modes of delivery, the changing needs of students and identified risks to the quality of the course of study.
3. Comprehensive reviews of courses of study are informed and supported by regular interim monitoring, of the quality of teaching and supervision of research students, student progress and the overall delivery of units within each course of study.
4. Review and improvement activities include regular external referencing of the success of student cohorts against comparable courses of study, including:
 - a. analyses of progression rates, attrition rates, completion times and rates and, where applicable, comparing different locations of delivery, and
 - b. the assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes for selected units of study within courses of study.
5. All students have opportunities to provide feedback on their educational experiences and student feedback informs institutional monitoring, review and improvement activities.
6. All teachers and supervisors have opportunities to review feedback on their teaching and research supervision and are supported in enhancing these activities.
7. The results of regular interim monitoring, comprehensive reviews, external referencing and student feedback are used to mitigate future risks to the quality of the education provided and to guide and evaluate improvements, including the use of data on student progress and success to inform admission criteria and approaches to course design, teaching, supervision, learning and academic support.



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